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For Immediate Release: June 30, 2004  
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### **Public Health and Public Safety Professionals Jointly Urge Citizens to *Leave the Fireworks to the Professionals***

“Many people ask me why shouldn’t they let their children play with sparklers?” said State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan. “I ask them if they would give their children a lighter to play with? Sparklers can burn at 1800 F – three times the temperature of a lit match - and hot sparkler wires have ignited clothing, burned bare feet, poked eyes out and started tragic holiday fires.

At a joint press conference today, a diverse group of Massachusetts fire, health, law enforcement, and medical professionals all stood together to urge the people of Massachusetts to ‘leave fireworks to the professionals.’ State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan was joined by Holyoke Fire Chief David LaFond, president of the Massachusetts Fire Chiefs’ Association; Michael Swain, president of the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts and Campus Fire Prevention Officer at the University of Massachusetts @ Amherst; Dr. Patrick Lee, Chief, Trauma and Emergency Medical Services, Baystate Medical Center; Dr. Jeffrey Wint, hand surgeon at The Hand Center of Western Massachusetts; Magda Rodriguez, coordinator for the Western Mass. SAFE Kids headquartered at Baystate Medical Center Children’s Hospital; State Police Lt. Martin Foley, supervisor of the Explosive Devices Unit, other State Police officers assigned to the Fire Marshal’s Fire and Explosives Investigation Section; and state fire code enforcement officials. The single goal of this diverse group of fire, health, law enforcement, and medical professionals is to reduce emergency room visits from fireworks injuries.

### **Fireworks Cause Thousands of Amputations**

“Each year, fireworks cause thousands of amputations of thumbs, fingers and hands,” said Dr. Jeffrey Wint, a surgeon at The Hand Center of Western Massachusetts. “Imagine trying to button your shirt without a working thumb? The saddest part is that the majority of people affected are children and young adults. It is important to safeguard against these preventable tragedies by following simple guidelines: let professionals handle the fireworks, stay at least 500 feet away from any fireworks, and do not handle any unexploded fireworks,” he said.

**Burn Injuries Take Months to Heal; Leave Scars that Last a Lifetime**

Dr. Patrick Lee, a Trauma Surgeon at Baystate Medical Center, said, "Burn injuries are tragic to children and their families. They are a life -changing event. Burns and their treatment are painful; leave surgical and emotional scars, and most of all they are preventable."

**Fireworks Send Over 3,000 children under 14 to Emergency Rooms Each Year**

"Every year, more than 3,000 children under age 14 are treated in emergency rooms for fireworks-related injuries. In fact, school-age children are at the highest risk of injury; children age 15 and younger account for 45% of firework-related hospital emergency department injuries," said Magda Rodriguez, coordinator of the Western Mass. S.A.F.E. Kids headquartered at Baystate Medical Center Children's Hospital. "The bright, colorful lights of fireworks sparks excitement in children, but they don't understand the dangers associated with handling them, so it is important to set a good example" she added.

**Fireworks Are Big Business**

"Let's face it, fireworks is big business in this county and it is hard for our safety message to be heard when millions of dollars are spent on advertising campaigns by national corporations. It's hard for us to compete with their glitzy direct mail, billboards, Internet sites, and radio ads that entice our citizens into using fireworks," said State Fire Marshal Coan. "Sadly, all these dollars lead to devastating injuries to mostly children. Children between the ages of 10 and 14 are most at risk of being injured by fireworks," said Coan. "It is clear that the ad campaigns are designed to target this age group," he added.

**4<sup>th</sup> of July No Holiday for Firefighters**

"Traditionally, the Fourth of July has been one of the busiest days of the year for firefighters who, in many communities, provide both emergency medical services as well as fire suppression," said Fire Prevention Officer Michael J. Swain, Campus Fire Prevention Officer at the University of Massachusetts @ Amherst and president of the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts. "The illegal use of fireworks by amateurs, bon fires, backyard barbecues gone haywire, lawnmowers refueled while the engine is still hot, and overheating cars mean that the Fourth of July is no holiday for firefighters," he added.

**Bomb-Making a Concern**

Holyoke Fire Chief David A. LaFond, president of the Fire Chiefs' Association of Massachusetts said, "Not only is the fire service concerned about fireworks causing brush fires and wayward bottle rockets igniting roofs and porches, but we are also concerned with people who use fireworks to make their own 'bigger bangs' or even teens who use fireworks to make bombs."

**Fireworks Are Illegal Except for Licensed Professionals**

State Police Lt. Martin Foley, Commander of the Hazardous Devices Unit in the Office of the State Fire Marshal said, "The possession and use of all fireworks by private citizens is illegal in Massachusetts. This includes Class C fireworks, which are sometimes falsely called 'safe and sane.' Examples of these are sparklers, party poppers, snappers, firecrackers, and spinners." He noted that the teens involved in the Columbine High School

incident in Littleton, Colorado used black powder from class C fireworks to build all of their explosive devices.

**Illegal to Bring Fireworks into Massachusetts from Out-of-State**

It is illegal to purchase fireworks in another state such as New Hampshire or Connecticut, and to then transport them into Massachusetts. Advertisers cannot be prohibited from advertising fireworks, but it is illegal to purchase fireworks through catalogues or over the Internet for delivery in this state. Many unhappy consumers have lost both their money and fireworks trying to circumvent the law. State Fire Marshal Coan said, "Play it safe and enjoy the many professional, supervised displays across the state this holiday week!"

**Fireworks Caused Over \$1 Million in Losses in Past Decade**

In the past decade we have had 563 major fire and explosions from fireworks, causing 21 civilian injuries, nine fire service injuries, two deaths, and \$1.4 million in property loss – all in a state where consumer fireworks are illegal. A majority of these incidents took place during the week of the Fourth of July holiday. Over the same period, the state's burn registry has had 64 reports of victims with burns extending over 5% of their body surface area. Of these, two-thirds were people under age 18.

**Demonstration of Danger**

Just how lethal fireworks can be, was shown in a startling demonstration conducted by the Department of Fire Services' Hazardous Devices Unit (a.k.a. the State Police bomb squad) at the Department of Fire Services Western Massachusetts Office in Northampton.

Fireworks, typical of those confiscated by law enforcement authorities, were attached to plywood silhouettes of people. The damage done to the plywood forms was shocking as spectators were asked to imagine how much worse the damage would be to a child's body. Plywood is much more durable than the human form. Also shown, was how quickly a sparkler can ignite the sleeve of children's clothing, the damage aerial fireworks such as bottle rockets can do when their flight path encounters a human face and eyes. What can happen when children squirrel fireworks away in their backpack was also shown.